

# The Writer's Workshop



from Diana Scimone  
[www.peapodpublishing.com](http://www.peapodpublishing.com)  
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Welcome to the latest issue of **The Writer's Workshop**, an e-letter designed to help you write your book.

Lots of exciting news to report!

First, the *Peapod Publishing* website is now up and running. Check out [www.peapodpublishing.com](http://www.peapodpublishing.com) for information on tools for writers, writer's coaching, back issues of **The Writer's Workshop**, and more.

Second, my new e-book, **How to Write a Book**, has just been published! It's packed with how-to information, practical direction, and step-by-step instructions to help you take your book from dream to reality. It contains the first seven issues of **The Writer's Workshop**, plus lots and lots more. You can download it with a few clicks of your mouse at [www.peapodpublishing.com](http://www.peapodpublishing.com). Just \$14.95, it's a great investment that will help you finally write the book you've always dreamed of writing.

And last but not least, next week I travel to Thailand on a fact-finding trip for PawPaw's Pals. Details are below under "Inspiration."

## 1. **How to Write a Book: Dealing with writer's block.**

You know the problem. There's a book inside you, but you can't get it on paper. From my observation, writer's block does not mean you don't have anything to say (you obviously have a book in you that's trying to get out), but rather that you don't know *how* to say it.

Or we could put it this way: Your book is designed to answer questions, but you can't answer those questions if you don't know what they are. So set aside your book for a day, and instead of answering questions, ask them.

"Although we all started life with a Da Vinci-like insatiable curiosity," writes Michael Gelb, author of the best-selling book [How to Think Like Leonardo Da Vinci](#), "most of us learned, once we got to school, that answers were more important than questions." Gelb says that Leonardo Da Vinci

carried a notebook with him at all times, using it to record among many other things his questions about how the world around him worked.

Based on Da Vinci's practice, Gelb recommends an exercise that might help you overcome writer's block. He calls it "A Hundred Questions."

Make a list of 100 questions that are important to you. "Do the entire list in one sitting," Gelb says. "Write quickly; don't worry about spelling, grammar, or repeating the same question in different words (recurring questions will alert you to emerging themes). Why a hundred questions? The first twenty or so will be 'off the top of your head.' In the next thirty or forty, themes often begin to emerge. And, in the latter part of the second half of the list you are likely to discover unexpected but profound material."

I couldn't believe how difficult it was to come up with 100 questions. My first was, "Why is the sky blue?" Number two was, "How high is up?" Number three was, "How am I ever going to come up with 97 more questions?" But once I cleared out the cobwebs after about question #30 or 40, themes did start to emerge, just as Gelb promised. And it helped me with what I was writing at the time.

When you finally reach question #100, choose the ten questions that seem most significant, and rank them in importance from one to ten. Don't try to answer them right now, Gelb cautions; your purpose is not to answer but to ask. As you look over your list, some of the questions you've asked will undoubtedly provide clues to the writer's block you've faced, and show you the questions you need to answer.

## **2. Tip of the Month: Read what your competition is up to.**

Actually books by other authors are not really your competition, because there's plenty of room for more books, including yours. You can learn a lot about your kind of book by reading what other authors have written in the same genre. Are you writing a historical novel that takes place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century? A cookbook on Asian cultures? A memoir based on the life of your grandmother? Find similar books that have already been published, and read them with a critical eye. What works? What doesn't? Why doesn't it? Ask questions! You can learn from what others have done right (and from what they've done wrong).

Not sure where to look? Amazon.com is the world's largest bibliographic resource—and it's absolutely free. Type in the title of a book in your genre, and then follow the links to "also recommended" books, book lists, reading lists, and more.

## **3. Inspiration: Little girls in cages**

A few years ago, I was in one of the largest cities in Asia. The couple I was visiting drove me through an area of town where dark and oppressive bro thels lined every street. (I'm purposely misspelling some of the words in this account in an effort to bypass over-zealous junk-mail filters.)

My host and his wife told me story after sad story of young women who were kidnapped and forced into prostitution. Some were even sold by their families. Many died of AIDS before too long. Others were beaten if they tried to escape. All endured terrible abuse at the hands of their captors and customers.

But the most tragic stories of all did not need any words; my host simply pointed to the cages that were barely visible in the darkened windows. There, little girls who had been bought and sold like farm animals were kept locked up until they no longer had a will to rebel or run. They became the youngest members of this horrific trade—some as young as five years old.

Sadly, that story is not confined to this one location, but is repeated in cities all over the world. I don't know about you, but I can't sit by and let this happen. Next week I'll travel to Thailand; the UN estimates there are 60,000-200,000 child prostitutes in this country alone. During my fact-finding trip, I'll explore ways that [PawPaw's Pals](#) can help these children. Our focus is helping children in disaster and crisis situations around the world—and I can't think of a more heart-wrenching crisis than this one.

If you'd like to contribute to this ongoing effort, you may make a donation by [clicking here](#) or by sending your check payable to PawPaw's Pals, Inc., PO Box 952949, Lake Mary, Florida 32795-2949. PawPaw's Pals, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and your donation is tax deductible. Thank you for partnering with us.

#### 4. The Last Word

Do you need additional help writing your book? Diana offers personalized coaching to writers all over the world. If you've always wanted to write a book, but didn't know how, a 90-minute coaching session by phone or in person will give you the tools and direction you need. Diana's practical and encouraging style will help you finally write the book you've dreamed of writing. To set up a coaching session, or to schedule writer's workshops or book signings: [diana@peapodpublishing.com](mailto:diana@peapodpublishing.com).

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#### Coming up:

March 10-11, teaching for-credit class at Geneva College Center for Urban Biblical Ministry, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

March 25-27: Fact-finding trip to Thailand for PawPaw's Pals

**The Writer's Workshop** is edited by Diana Scimone, president of Peapod Publishing, Inc. Diana is a writer, editor, journalist, children's book author, and writer's coach. Her writing has taken her to nearly 40 countries, including Sudan, China, India, Kenya, Singapore, Korea, Thailand, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere. Diana is the author of *Adventures with PawPaw*, a series of children's books about a little

dog who travels to a different country in each book, introducing young children to other countries and cultures ([www.adventureswithpawpaw.com](http://www.adventureswithpawpaw.com)).

Diana is also founder and president of PawPaw's Pals, Inc., an international relief agency helping children in disaster and crisis situations around the world. Donate to PawPaw's Pals at [www.pawpawspals.org](http://www.pawpawspals.org) PawPaw's Pals is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and all donations are tax deductible.

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